

1.3. Present natural assets in an experiential manner

This Strategic Action strengthens Montana's tourism product and marketing efforts.

Recommended Tactics

MTOT, Regions, CVBs, Communities, Tribes, Businesses & Organizations

- » Use images and text in visitor information and marketing pieces that reflect not only the scenic beauty of the state or region, but the *experiences* and activities that visitors will enjoy in that setting.
- » Monitor and consider trends in outdoor recreation when developing promotional materials.
- » Present cultural or heritage *experiences* rather than just assets or locations; for example: taking horseback or wagon rides, or attending county fairs or rodeos, to experience the agricultural and pioneering heritage as opposed to simply seeing agricultural areas through a windshield.
- » Target market segments with specific experiences that are particularly appealing to them.
- » Link to electronic word-of-mouth – including travel blogs and reviews – to showcase experiences available in a particular natural setting.
- » Present iconic locations (see Action 1.1.) in an experiential manner.

Indicators of Success

- » Existing and developing visitor information presents Montana's spectacular nature in an experiential way. Montana is differentiated from other destinations that offer "unspoiled nature" by the "breathtaking experiences" that can be enjoyed within the natural setting, as promised by the Montana Brand.

Background & Rationale

Research consistently shows that today's traveler seeks *experiences*, rather than just attractions. It is important, then, for a visitor to know not only that Montana offers spectacular natural assets, but also what they can *do* within that setting. This allows them to start envisioning their vacation experience (making a "vacation movie") – a crucial step between having Montana on their list of places they'd like to go and actually planning and booking a trip.

Presenting Montana's spectacular natural setting in an experiential way also differentiates Montana from other places that offer similar scenery. A 2006 analysis of all 50 state tourism websites found that *most* of the sites emphasize nature and culture/heritage as their unique selling proposition. Montana's neighboring states offer many of the same scenic assets as Montana. It is important, therefore, for the potential visitor to see the superb *experience* offered in Montana's natural setting versus other similar settings.

Iconic locations (see Action 1.1.) should be selected and presented with an experiential perspective. For example, if the Yellowstone River were to be used, it can be shown with paddlers or fishermen.

A 2010 U.S. Forest Service assessment (U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, 2012) found that outdoor recreational participation is growing, and that activity choices are changing. Viewing natural scenery, flora, and wildlife continue to be the most common activities, with more than half the population participating in each and participation growing by 18% to 25% from the early-2000s through recent years. Participation in birding, as another example, grew by almost 23% over that period to top one-third of the

population. While participation in non-motorized water-sports is still less common (less than 10% of the population), it is growing rapidly, including a 103% increase in kayaking. These trends can help to guide targeted marketing and the experiential presentation of Montana's natural assets in promotional efforts. Allowing visitors to leave "trip reports", travel blogs, or reviews of their experiences in Montana on visitor information sites adds the credibility of word-of-mouth recommendations. Links to reviews or travel blogs on other travel sites also serve this purpose. Particularly enthusiastic reviews can be highlighted in visitor information to help inspire potential travelers.

Resources

See research available from the Outdoor Foundation at <http://www.outdoorfoundation.org/>
Excellent information regarding the "buy cycle" of travelers: *European Segmentation Study: Alberta Summary*, by Insignia Market Research, 2008, especially pp.15-16, at <http://industry.travelalberta.com/Markets/~media/Industry/Attachments/Markets/Research/AlbertaSummary2008.ashx>